

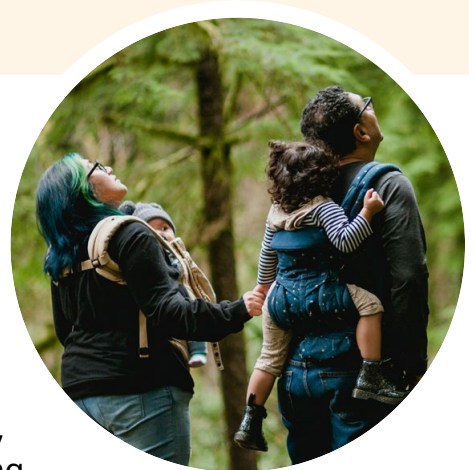
Climate and Health in Oregon

2024 Report

Executive summary

Accelerating climate change is directly affecting the health of Oregonians in many ways, and those impacts are not felt equally. Increasing instances of extreme heat, wildfire smoke, water insecurity, and winter hazards worsen public health across the state, while exacerbating existing health inequities.

Globally, 2024 was the hottest year on record. In Oregon, it was warmer than average with some areas experiencing record-breaking temperatures. Large-scale wildfires burned over 1.7 million acres across the state, the most acreage burned in a single year in Oregon's history. Counties in eastern and southern Oregon experienced more days at higher temperatures than the year before, further compounding the impact of wildfires. About 1.2 million Oregonians experienced more than 28 days of combined exposure to both extreme heat and smoke. Climate projections indicate freezing rain and ice accumulation, similar to the conditions experienced in much of western Oregon in January 2024, may more frequently accompany winter storms in parts of the northern Willamette Basin.



Inequities in climate and health impacts

Advancing health equity is at the core of OHA's mission. While we are all vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change, some communities of color, Tribal communities, lower income, unhoused, and rural communities are disproportionately impacted. Data from 2024 are helping us better understand which populations to prioritize in our public health strategies. In 2024 in Oregon:

- There were 21 heat-related deaths, most of whom were older adults and men. People who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native accounted for a higher proportion of heat-related illness emergency and urgent care center visits than their proportion of the population. Increases in weekly non-fatal drownings and submersions coincided with periods of extreme heat, especially among out-of-state visitors.
- Black and African American individuals experienced a disproportionate impact from air-quality related respiratory illnesses, in part due to wildfire smoke and pollution.
- Ten counties, mostly rural, experienced more than 40 days with extreme heat and poor air quality occurring at the same time. This was six more counties than 2023.

Public health system climate and health actions

The Governor and Oregon legislature continued investment in climate resilience through Oregon's public health system, growing a robust infrastructure to help Oregonians adapt to climate change hazards. The Oregon Health Authority (OHA), health departments of Federally Recognized Tribes, local (county) public health authorities (LPHAs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) form Oregon's public health system, implementing policies and programs that strengthen climate adaptation statewide. New and continuing actions in 2024 include:

- **Climate resilience as an OHA strategic priority.** Climate resilience is prominent in [OHA's 2024–27 Strategic Plan](#), underscoring the agency's commitment to end environmental health inequities. This priority elevated its organizational importance beyond OHA Public Health Division and spotlights climate adaptation strategies across Equity and Inclusion, Medicaid, and Health Policy and Analytics divisions.
- **Public health modernization seeding climate resilience across public health system partners.** Oregon is modernizing its public health system to be equitable, prevention-focused and prepared to protect Oregonians from current and emerging health hazards, including those from climate change. In the 2023–2025 biennium, the Oregon Legislature allocated an additional

\$50 million for public health modernization funding in the Governor’s budget, adding onto the \$60 million investment appropriated in previous legislative sessions. OHA, LPHAs, 76 CBOs and eight Federally Recognized Tribes of Oregon received resources to support a healthy, climate-ready Oregon. Climate and health adaptation plans, data system modernization, staffing, community engagement, and climate adaptation projects are all part of this cross-system public health effort.

- **Tracking collective climate and health progress.** In 2024, OHA’s Public Health Division adopted [Public Health Accountability Metrics](#) to set climate and health goals and measure progress towards achieving them by 2030. Accountability measures include requirements for LPHAs to develop climate and health adaptation plans and actions. OHA is accountable to provide technical assistance, publish guidance, recommend policy change, and steward health data to support partner work. OHA adopted specific metrics tied to two major climate impacts on health in Oregon: respiratory illness due to wildfire smoke and heat-related illnesses. OHA will publish progress through [annual reports](#) and will develop metrics that measure progress toward reducing drinking water insecurity and mental health impacts of climate change.
- **Medicaid climate supports for people in transition.** Starting in March 2024, the Oregon Health Plan (Oregon’s program for delivering Medicaid benefits) began offering first-in-the-nation protections from extreme temperatures and smoke to some of our most vulnerable neighbors – people going through major life transitions such as being at risk of houselessness or transitioning out of foster care or incarceration. These Oregon Health Plan Climate Supports provide housing, climate and nutrition support for these populations. From March to May 2024, OHA also distributed nearly 1,000 portable air conditioners and air filters to people in Oregon who are socially and medically vulnerable to smoke and heat impacts. These life-saving devices were in place in advance of the July 2024 heat wave.
- **Healthy Homes Grants.** In 2024, OHA issued nearly \$20.4 million to 34 organizations across the state for [Healthy Homes Grant Program](#) (HHGP) grants to repair and rehabilitate homes of low-income residents. OHA also set aside \$3 million in HHGP funds for the Nine Federally Recognized Tribes in Oregon. Grantee organizations help residents repair and rehabilitate dwellings to help them stay housed and safe from climate and environmental hazards.
- **Climate hazards information and outreach for the public and partners.** OHA experts collaborate with agency and community partners to produce environmental health advisories and health guidance, analyze data, support public communications, and mobilize public health interventions in response

to climate hazards. For example, in 2024 OHA co-facilitated 26 Interagency Smoke Coordination Calls among partners responding to wildfires across the state, informing issuance of air quality advisories, developing public safety messaging, distributing public health risk communication toolkits, and providing near-real-time data about people arriving at emergency departments with smoke-related respiratory concerns.

Notable climate and health collaborations with state and federal partners

In 2024, OHA continued to collaborate with state and federal agency partners on climate adaptation and mitigation programs and policies. OHA provided data, information and expertise on incorporating health equity principles and strategies into shared work, helping fellow agencies prioritize communities that experience disproportionate risks from environmental and climate hazards.

- **Environmental Justice Mapping Tool.** OHA continued to work closely with the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and other state agency partners in support of the [Environmental Justice Council](#)-led initiative to develop an Oregon-specific environmental justice mapping tool. This tool will provide policy makers, the public, and state and local agencies with geospatial information about communities disproportionately affected by environmental stressors and inform state policies, programs, and investment decisions.
- **Smoke Management and Prescribed Fire.** In 2024, the regional directors of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the US Forest Service, and directors of state health, environmental, and forestry agencies of Oregon and Washington signed a [joint regional agreement](#) to increase the pace and scale of prescribed fire in the Pacific Northwest while centering protection of public health. Prescribed fire or burning is a land management practice that reduces the risk of wildfires through controlled burns in high-risk areas. In Spring 2024, the interagency group designated and carried out the [West Bend Prescribed Fire Pilot Project](#) under this agreement. The pilot included intensive outreach and education to the public and succeeded in treating seven times more acres of forest than in past years. This effort complements Oregon's long-standing Smoke Management Program implemented by the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) in collaboration with DEQ and OHA.
- **Oregon Climate Action Commission.** The [Oregon Climate Action Commission](#) (OCAC) tracks trends in greenhouse gas emissions, recommends ways to coordinate state and local efforts to reduce emissions, and works to prepare communities for the effects of climate change. In 2023, the Oregon Legislature passed a bill that modernized the previous Oregon Global Warming Commission and renamed it the Oregon Climate

Action Commission as of January 2024. Changes included adding the OHA director as a named ex-officio (non-voting) OCAC commissioner. OHA participates regularly and helps inform OCAC deliberations and reports with climate and health information, including OCAC's biennial report to the Oregon Legislature.

The full [Oregon Climate and Health in 2024 Oregon Report](#) is available online.

You can get this document in other languages, large print, braille or a format you prefer free of charge. Contact the Climate and Health Program at 971-673-0977 or email climate.health@dhsoha.state.or.us. We accept all relay calls.

Public Health Division
Climate and Health Program

Phone: 971-673-0977
climate.health@dhsoha.state.or.us



200-105251_OHA 2469b_24 (01/2026)